1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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Saramacca

herding the children before them so that they would be upwind from the coffin and the stench of decaying flesh.

As they returned the rear bearer was relieved; the tension eased for a moment, but there was one man who did not smile. And it was whispered that he lived in the part of the village where the corpse invariably went. The scene changed slightly; Sedefo, who had stopped questioning, resumed his efforts, and five, ten, fifteen times the bearers advanced toward him and retreated from where he stood. Sometimes we caught our breath; the corpse was coming toward us; but always the bearers swerved before they reached us, going no farther than the grove of thorn palms that grew near the house of death. Then once more they broke through the ranks of questioners and, followed by the watchers, were off in the direction of the village council house and the dwelling of the chief.

The bearer who had been relieved came forward; the corpse, he said, wanted to speak; he must be allowed to carry the body again. This time there was little relief while the change was being made, for the man was possessed, and the air vibrated with the intensity of the spirit which animated him. But apparently there were still difficulties. Again and again the questions were asked, again and again the bearers advanced, retreated. Sedefo kept insisting "Yu *mu* taki. You *must* speak!" and again the coffin advanced, retreated, and then once more went to our left into the village.

Clouds were rising to windward; the sun was low on the horizon. The bearers returned, advanced to the village head once, twice, again, and again, and then the coffin was placed on the ground, raised three times, and left there for a moment before others took it into the house and replaced it where it had been when we first saw it. The ceremony was over; the elders of the village went to hold council and to interpret what the dead man had said.

In the swift tropical dusk, Sedefo and his son came to take us back to our camp. The drummers were adjusting the drums for the night's dancing. "He spoke, ai," he told

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his hold on the *baboula*. The child is finally allowed to remain. He can keep time well enough and that is what the *baboula* is for. 533

It is now night, jungle night. The tomtoms crash out in a full-throated chorus. It is a driving, compelling rhythm of hollow sounds. The timbre is heavy, hypnotic, maddening. The drummers achieve a difference of tone by striking near the edge, which gives a shrill sound, and then returning to the centre, which booms by contrast.

The effect of the drums may be a species of hypnosis. Hypnosis can be produced experimentally by the sound of rhythmical tapping, without any condition of sleep.

The patting of the fingers on the drum-head of dried skin seems to induce in these primitives a type of hypnoid exaltation. The cause of it is the monotonous, rhythmical repetition of booming sounds. Fatigue falls away. Memories of other evenings around the jungle fires come crowding back. They imagine that Apuku seizes their bodies. Demoniacal possession is a phenomenon well known to history; here we have it in the South American bush. Here it is called *winti*. 533 158

The hypnoid stimulus—monotonous repetition—is reproduced in the other instruments that accompany the tomtoms. The first of these is the *saka-sake*, a gourd stuck on a handle and filled with pebbles. Then there is the *quaqua*, a flat board of resounding wood that is beaten with a hard paddle. Now the primitive orchestra is in full swing. [534]

By this time the crowd has arranged itself in a circle, with a bare space in the centre. The fires glow luridly on black 533 796

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Shadows roll on the brown skin and quiver with the firelight. 796

It is a vivid picture, these naked girls standing still in the 535
flickering light of the fire, making their muscles dance to the monotony of the drums. Sweat breaks out on the foreheads of the drummers and runs down their faces, dropping off their chins unnoticed. The music grows louder and louder. 796
Apuku is coming. The stalwart black with the saka-sake 535
holds it at arm's length, braces his feet apart, and delivers his 153
whole body to the rhythm. The little girls, loath to stop, are seized by their proud mothers who rush out to embrace them, cheek to cheek. Others press forward with compliments for the excited girls. There is no stopping of the drums now. Louder and faster the metre becomes, a veritable pandemonium. No conversation or restrained observation is possible, due to the noise; the psychological effect is to wipe out the inhibitions of daily life and induce a state of semi-hysterical exhilaration. The white man, forgetting civilization for a time, feels like stamping his feet and shaking himself. And over all is the insistent monotony of the drums.

A woman has attached dried rattling nuts to her ankles, [534]
and enters the clearing to be swayed by the drums. She too bends her body at a right angle, palms outward, caressing invisible curves in time with the beat of the drums. Her torso writhes, in time to the beat of the drums. She would be crying aloud, were it not for the pulsation of the drums. Two other women come out and accompany her, then another, then more, until finally eight or nine are dancing in the

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796 535 158 centre clearing, no longer caring, no longer entirely conscious, their bodies driven by the rhythm of the drums.

No man has yet danced. Now a young buck of nineteen jumps into the centre and begins the *awasa* dance. His movements simulate the flying of a hawk, arms out like wings, pirouetting gracefully. His bare feet stamp the earth, hard enough, it seems, to break his bones. Another man joins him, waving his arms at full length, like an eagle in flight. They chant in talkee-talkee an *awasa* song:

"Fooru mo luku bon nanga ahga."

[539] It means: The fowl must be careful of the hawk; in other words, the girls must be careful of the men. They circle from the waist like birds soaring into the blue.

796 832 Now a man begins dancing toward a woman. She retreats. No dancer has yet touched another, or even noticed another. But this one is making definite love advances to the woman. He mimics coitus. Coyly she evades his approaches, and will have none of his movements. They are not serious. When she definitely refuses his copulatory advances, the drums stop. He takes a drum from one of the men, puts it under his arm, and follows her, dancing around the clearing, beating out a message of love. They weave a pattern of movement, in and out, in this dance of courtship to the lone muttering tambour.

[202] There is a halt. The drummers rap out a message to other canoes coming up the river, telling them to hurry. Soon more strangers arrive for the final round.

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Then comes the *sacatee* dance, accompanied by songs of the rebellion. Ancient heroes live again. Once more raids are made on outlying plantations. The spirit of defiance that Stedman found at Boucou is still kept alive. Then come softer songs—songs of love. *"Te e durmi e songa me, grandanke,"* a girl sings plaintively. She is telling her lover, "When you sleep, dream of me, many thanks." *"Te kai me u seni neauco, becan na bonu soni e ta layme"*—"When you lead me to deceit I will not follow; such things you should not teach me."

Again the dancers find fault with the orchestra, protesting loudly. They are not satisfied with the rhythm. Abruptly the chief dancer seizes a drum and rolls out a call to Apuku, god of the forest, asking Apuku to come.

Dimly through the darkness they can feel some response. Apuku is coming. Everyone runs back a few steps and utters a slight scream. The spirit of the bush god is entering their bodies. He is welcomed with a little dance, jerkily done, in which all participate. Then comes the special Apuku dance, where writhing, circling, snaking arms simulate the twisted lianas of the jungle, which is the god's home.

Once the spirit of the bush god has entered them, they cannot stop. The drums increase their volume and tempo, until the rhythm is too rapid and intricate for white ears to follow. Now truly they are hypnotized by the feverish monotony, the shuffling beat of fingers on the drum-heads. Because of this trance, fatigue is forgotten. The little *baboula* keeps steady time, throbbing like a heart-beat. Flat hands

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796 shade out strange metres on the *nanda*. There is a break; the
535 orchestra stops, and the interval is filled in with the heavy
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158 booming of the *apenti*. Often the drummers seize a bush-
[534] knife and batter at the pegs, stretching the dried skin to the proper tone. Mist from the river has dampened their hair, unnoticed. The dance will continue until morning; they must play until the spirit of Apuku has gone.

796 Everything is set for the climax. Some are still watching
535 while the others dance. Since the old men are too dignified,
158 their places are taken by younger men from sixteen to twenty-five. There are more women dancing than men, anyhow. The white man is wondering how it is going to end. Despite the excitement there has been no orgiastic episode.

Grand finale. There is a tremendous screech from out of the blackness beyond. Three practically naked blacks come rushing up from the river, their faces and bodies daubed
[302] hideously with pemba dotee, the ceremonial white clay. One has stripes around his arms, belly, and legs, his face all white. Another's face is bisected with white and yellow pigment. The third is Adjobo, the medicine man; he has circles of clay on his forehead, cheeks, and chin, and rings around his neck. The presence of the ceremonial clay indicates the presence of a god. There is no doubt but that the hideousness of these men inspires a feeling of awe.

They burst into the circle of dancers and scatter them. Everyone retreats before them, with actual or pretended fright. The children become hysterical and cling frantically to their mothers for protection. Women in the crowd are cry-

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ing. The vibrating tomtoms are pouring out a great volume of tangled sound. The three religious dancers whirl like furies. One dances with a wicked-looking machete; he makes it whistle through the air and brings it down with all his might into the ground between two drummers. They do not budge. A second dancer dashes into the bahkra's hut with his whirling bush-knife, hacking at everything in sight. The others seize him and overpower him, not before he has damaged many things with his vicious chops.

This ominous fury characterizes the hysterical possession of the *Cromanti* dance, the wild, mad dance of the evil spirit of the *con con dree*. The crowd keep clear of the chopping knives of the possessed men. They mutter unknown incantations in *odo*, making wild turns and gyrations. One falls on his knees to eat of the earth. Another bites the door of a hut like a dog. The third frees himself from a group of the struggling men who seek to restrain him, jumps into the rapids, swims against the great rush of water with feverish strength, and finally would drown were it not that his family rescues him with a canoe. There is nothing mystical about the extreme muscular endurance of such states; it can be produced experimentally in the laboratory.

The remaining obeiah dancers have a sham battle, fencing skilfully and dangerously with their bush-knives. First they stalk an imaginary enemy with poised machetes. Their muscular torsos held in strained attention would delight a sculptor. Picture a black, arms thrown out and head thrown back, eyes closed in frenzy, tense and foaming lips laying bare his

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796 clenched teeth, stamping the earth like an animal. Then two
535 such blacks, with glazed eyes, slashing at each other with
158 yard-long knives. This is the obeiah dance. Nothing can stop it until the dancers are exhausted and drop from sheer fatigue. Then the spirit of the god has fled.

796 Until that time, protesting is useless. It is useless for the
535 bahkra to protest that he wants to go to sleep: *"Me wanny go seepy."* No attention is paid to that. It is dawn before the dancers finally stop. The visitors go down to the river to get in their corials. We light the dim path for them with a flashlight. They are grateful, and compose a little song of thanks. Even after the corials draw away from the bank, excited women get up in the boats and continue to dance, palms outward, hips high. It is no wonder that the marines in Haiti must confiscate the drums to keep the Negroes quiet. So long as the primitive holds to his intoxicating tom-toms, which manufacture courage automatically, he will never be a coward.

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825 796 embraced the drummers, streaking the men's heads with pemba dotee. A number of women in the audience also caught the spirit. One of them began to shake and convulse; when 825 796 158 she awoke from her trance, she ran to her hut in the village. Another woman began to murmur as though in a dream. Still another one ran about among the assembly streaking and rubbing others with the sacred white clay. This dance continued until very late, and the whites, overcome by fatigue, were forced to retire.

The next morning at daybreak they again assembled. One of the women began to chant in a thin strange voice, and at 6 A. M. the dance started again. A couple ran dancing into the village clearing and smeared a man with pemba dotee; he also began to prance and became hysterical. This is known as *winti kiki*, or the transference of winti from one person to another. Several others, obtaining the spirit in the same way, began to dance. One man, after dancing a long while, ran around the clearing and finally fell flat on his face. He remained there until others carried him away. The man who had been playing the ageedah drum circled around with his drum between his legs like a hobby horse. Some of the women fell on their knees and continued to dance thus. One fell to the ground and beat the earth with her arms and legs. This ceremony ended at 10 A. M., after which the body of the snake, which had all this while been carefully guarded, was buried with great solemnity.

The dancing recommenced at four o'clock in the afternoon. The women went to a little Gadu house. One had a

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severe attack of winti. She fell upon her knees and appeared half lame. The others lifted her up. A youth came with a green stick; he bit into it and spat on the woman's calves, legs, feet, and arms. After a while she was able to stand alone. This seemed to constitute the end of the dance. It had somehow become known that the Papa Gadu, the snake spirit, was angry, and this big *gadu pray* (god's spread) had been necessary in order to propitiate him.

The women who are seized with the winti sometimes mutter a few words. The others regard these as the utterances of a spirit and say: *"Ya, gadu"*—"yes, God." Upon inquiry among the women who had caught the winti spirit, Mr. de Goeje found that they all complained of feeling very dizzy or giddy when in such a trance.

Certain localities, as well as individuals, may be possessed by evil spirits. The Pwaba Creek is such a place. Were a Djuka to go up this creek with any clothing on, he would never come out alive. So upon entering the waters of Pwaba the Djuka strips off all his clothes. That nullifies the bad magic.

Every Bush Negro, to protect himself from all varieties of black magic, wears a number of charms or amulets. He

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One also often finds as an avowed goal the idea of being useful to his lineage.

Disinterested mystical impulses appear totally absent from these cults.

But that is only one aspect of the phenomena of possession; they really seem to be, in large measure, unconscious and involuntary. Everyone can try to obtain a gadu, but everyone does not succeed; one must have a certain predisposition. "One cannot oblige a gadu to enter a man," say the Boni; it certainly seems, in fact, that in nearly half the cases possession takes place spontaneously and sometimes to the great terror of the person concerned: this is observed especially in the kunu.

Mimi, a woman about 46 years old in 1958, of the Kotika lineage, was possessed by two gadu, an Ampuku and a Papa gadu. Here is how her near relatives relate the fashion in which they came into her.

About ten years before, Mimi was showing signs of mental derangement. Her mind wandered, she sometimes used to leave the village to run in the bush at random, she uttered disconnected words (1). Then she fell very ill (pleurisy?).

1. It is necessary to note on this subject the very widely held idea among the Refugee Blacks, as among the Creoles, that certain forms of mental imbalance are due to the action of an entity which is trying to manifest itself in a man and does not succeed. In order to cure this man, he must be "washed" with appropriate leaves so that the god can come to manifest itself in him; the rest of the time he will be normal.

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153 The teacher has the pupil turn in a circle around the
797 mortar in which has been prepared the infusion of leaves, until
787 he is dizzy. Alternately he makes him turn and "washes" his body with the infusion. Possession occurs by itself at the end of a certain number of sessions.

[276] In the practices intended to make the gita of Kumẽnti
[171] "rise," the absorption of toxic substances enters, especially tobacco juice, method employed by the Indian medicine men. But once the reflexes are created, there is no further need for these substances; the gita appears as soon as the calling procedures are used, which are of two kinds:

--Personal procedures: The man voluntarily calls on his gita while putting on the god's costume and taking a certain posture;

--Outside procedures: The gita may be released from outside either by calling the god by name or by beating the corresponding rhythm on the drum.

787 When the pupil begins to feel the gita of Kumẽnti, that
• 158 is first manifested by trances. We have very often been present at these attacks, which usually come on at night in the forest, but commonly also during the day. The one possessed suddenly lets go of the objects he was holding (for example, if he was in the process of eating, he drops plate and spoon), and rushes forward running through the forest howling rhythmically as if he had become an animal. His eyes are rolled upward, he no longer is conscious of his surroundings; he is not in any way threatening; these fits are totally inoffensive in spite of their
[147] impressive aspect. One sees possessed people in this state do things which are difficult to explain, such as running in complete darkness in the most impenetrable underbrush without falling or hurting themselves, or climbing up in a few seconds on a craggy rock which would have been hard to scale in full daylight.

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153 791 787 [195] In proportion as the pupil perfects himself, the god expresses itself more easily with the help of his body, begins to do coordinated acts and to speak. They say that the gita has been "arranged" (seeka). The Kumẽnti speak with a gruff, jerky voice, characteristic, which humorists love to imitate in the evenings' recitals.

In order to call on his gita voluntarily, the pupil crouches down, feet together, throwing pemba from right to left at the level of his feet and uttering the formula: "O Kumẽnti, djumpo ku a mi." Then he remains immobile in this position and waits; possession takes place generally at the end of a few minutes.

776 787 The Kumẽnti which enter thus into men are exclusively male gods; it is known that they have wives [illegible]e they talk about them, but they never manifest themselves.

[812] The Kumẽnti are generally benevolent; still, no more than any divinity of the Refugee Blacks, do they represent a principle of goodness and justice in itself. They watch in a partial fashion over the interests of their bearers. Thus it is that A..., of the Dipẽlu II lo, has a Kumẽnti which reacts in a violent way when it has the impression that danger threatens [158] its bearer. It enters into him suddenly, takes a machete and storms through the village, while people prudently barricade themselves in their houses.

787 789 In certain circumstances, when their trances are particularly intense, the people possessed by Kumẽnti are capable, it is said, of walking in fire, dancing on broken glass, climbing thorny awara palm trees, and even having themselves struck with blows of a machete without any wound resulting from it. Professor de Goeje gives impressive personal testimony on this subject, such as the case of a possessed man who overturned a pail of boiling water on his body (1). Mr. Mathieu, Director of

1. In a note in Mr. W.F. van Lier's work, § 37.